

### EPHRAIM PORTER FELT—1868–1943

The New York Entomological Society as well as the entire scientific world has lost one of its most respected and outstanding members in the passing of Dr. E. Porter Felt. He was a leader in the field of entomology and was recognized as such internationally. He was widely known as a scientist, writer and lecturer. As State Entomologist of New York for thirty years his valuable publications were looked upon as standard for this type of work. As Director of the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories from 1928 until his death, he became a world authority on the care of shade trees. Real leaders are few in any walk of life. Dr. Felt was one of the few but his influence was valued by many.

Ephraim Porter Felt was born at Salem, Massachusetts, January 7, 1868, a son of Charles Wilson Felt and Martha Seeth (Ropes) Felt. His background was like one of many similar old New England families. As a youth he had decided upon the ministry as a career but became interested in insect problems while attending college and this became the basis of his life work. He received the degree of B.Sc. from the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1891 and also a degree of B.Sc. from Boston University the same year. The degree of D.Sc. was bestowed upon him by Cornell University in 1894. After teaching Natural Science at The Clinton Liberal Institute, Fort Plain, New York, from 1893–1895, he became Assistant to the State Entomologist at Albany. Upon Dr. Lintner's death, he became State Entomologist of New York, which post he held for thirty years, until 1928 when he came to the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories as Director and Chief Entomologist.

In the field of insect taxonomy he achieved international fame for his careful and extensive studies on the gall midges—the Cecidomyidæ or Itonididæ as he preferred to call them. In 1913 he gave the annual public address on Gall Insects before the Entomological Society of America at Atlanta, Georgia. In 1914 he was elected a member of the American National Committee on Nomenclature of the Second International Congress. I have learned from Professor C. P. Alexander of Massachusetts State

College that Dr. Felt had reported to him in 1942 that he had described 1,060 new species of gall midges and plant mites. With the late D. B. Young, his assistant at Albany, he had described a number of mosquitoes which are indicated in the literature under the joint authorship of Felt and Young.

Dr. Felt became a corresponding member of the New York Entomological Society on October 20, 1900, and an active member on February 5, 1907. After coming to Stamford in 1928 he frequently presented papers at the New York Entomological Society meetings which included subjects of a varied nature from gall midges to poetry concerning insects, as well as numerous valuable contributions on shade tree insects.

Dr. Felt's first entomological work was in Massachusetts in the early days of the gypsy moth invasion. His experience with this destructive forest and shade tree pest led him in 1924 in his work for the New York State Conservation Commission to propose a barrier zone two hundred miles in length to stem the spread of the gypsy moth into New York State from New England.

Dr. Felt was a pioneer in airplane collection of insects and made extensive studies on windborne insects. He made studies on the wind drift of insects on the top of the State Education Building, Albany, N. Y., the Empire State Building in New York City, as well as on other tall city buildings and his work on windborne insects has been very important in ascertaining the direction of spread of the Dutch elm disease which is carried to a large extent by the European elm bark beetle.

In the late 90's and early 1900's, Dr. Felt studied the spread of many diseases by the common house fly and by mosquitoes and made important contributions to this phase of entomology. In the February, 1944, issue of the *National Geographic* there was an article "Saboteur Mosquitoes" by Mr. Stage, Senior Entomologist of the United States Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, in which is recorded some of the work done on mosquitoes years ago under the direction of Dr. Felt.

Dr. Felt was very much interested in and very capable of doing editorial work and was editor of the *Journal of Economic Entomology* since its start in 1908. At one time he was editor of the *National Shade Tree Conference Reports*.

While State Entomologist of New York he published 25 official reports covering the activities of that office and many bulletins, which were published by the New York State Museum, as well as more than 700 timely papers and articles which included a wide variety of entomological work comprising general entomology as well as popular articles of an informative nature for the general public. He was a frequent contributor to entomological journals and scientific publications, as well as magazines and newspapers. He found time to give numerous addresses, to publish several popular books and to speak over the radio on different phases of entomological and shade tree activities. His published reports and bulletins were models of systematic arrangement and clarity of expression.

During his long and useful career, Dr. Felt had been a collaborator of the United States Bureau of Entomology, the entomological editor of the *Country Gentleman* from 1898 to 1911 and a member of the Supervisory Board of the *American Year Book*. He was a past president of the American Association of Economic Entomologists, a past president of the National Shade Tree Conference, a fellow of the Entomological Society of America, a life member of the American Entomological Society, a member of the New York and Washington Entomological Societies and of Sigma Xi and Phi Kappa Phi. Among the honors accorded him were a gold, and three silver medals at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, N. Y., in 1901. He was a member of the Fraternity of Alpha Sigma Phi.

For the last twelve years, he was the author of a weekly syndicated newspaper article entitled "Talks on Trees" which was used by nearly three hundred newspapers throughout the country. He was the author of a number of well-known books on insects and trees, his two-volume work "Insects Affecting Park and Woodland Trees" appearing in 1906 and "Manual of Tree and Shrub Insects" in 1923. He was co-author with Dr. W. H. Rankin of "Insects and Diseases of Ornamental Trees and Shrubs" published in 1932. His "Plant Galls and Gall Makers" appeared in 1940.

Three outstanding books on shade trees were published more recently—"Our Shade Trees," in 1938, a second edition of which

appeared in 1942; "Pruning Trees and Shrubs," in 1941, and "Shelter Trees in War and Peace," in 1943.

On December 8, 1943, Dr. Felt attended the national meetings of the American Association of Economic Entomologists held in Columbus, Ohio. On his way back he stopped at Utica, N. Y., to visit his son. He was back at his office on Monday, December 13. He seemed none the worse for the rigorous trip and was in excellent spirits. On Tuesday morning, December 14, he told his secretary that the night before he doubted whether he would be in that day. He said he felt as though he was coming down with the flu the night before but felt all right that morning. With a twinkle in his eye, he said that he had had such symptoms before and that nothing came of them. "You see," he said, "I am still pretty tough." These were the last words that Miss Burns, his secretary, heard him speak. I talked with him a few minutes later when he was going out to the Ferguson Library to look up some references and he seemed to be all right then. Later he came back to the building and died very suddenly of a heart attack.

Surviving him, in his immediate family, are three daughters and a son, a sister and two brothers, and thirteen grandchildren.

A few days after Dr. Felt had passed away, I received a letter from Dr. Peairs, present editor of the *Journal of Economic Entomology*, recounting his conversation with Dr. Felt during the Columbus meetings. I would like to quote that part of Dr. Peair's letter.

"I cannot refrain from telling you a little episode in Columbus; I had a chat with Dr. Felt and he brought up a discussion of some of the members who had recently died; I casually mentioned the fact that four ex-presidents had died in the last few months. Dr. Felt, with his faint smile, remarked, not seriously at all, 'I am hereby resigning my position as an ex-president of the Association, effective at once.' I am sure he thought of it as nothing but a little joke, as I did. But somehow, I almost wish the subject had not come up."

Dr. Felt was a great scientist, a splendid gentleman and an invaluable friend. Honest, sincere and upright, he moved through life with a tranquil demeanor and faith in his fellow



men. Trivialities neither upset him nor deterred him from any worthy purpose or goal.

His prime thoughts were for the younger, newer men. All were stimulated by his great personality. He aided their efforts with cheer and lent a helping hand no matter how adverse the difficulty or how uncertain the going.

I first met Dr. Felt in 1920. I have known him as a friend, as a counsellor, as a superior and as a leader. Since 1929, it was my privilege and honor to work with him side by side on important research and I have never ceased to marvel at his deft ability to size up and conquer a problem and at his unruffled composure in the face of trying obstacles.

Of him I can use no greater expression than to say that he was an all around great American. His flexibility of outlook was manifested by the ability to direct itself in a flash from the deep abstruse contemplation of science to the broad generalities of national life. He was intensely interested in the world about him. His human ties were broad and comprehensive. His love for children was apparent to many.

He was an avid reader, and enjoyed the radio from the political speeches of the great to the humor of Charlie McCarthy. He had a deep and abiding sense of humor and was quick and accurate at repartee. A remark was once made on his winged collar, so characteristic of his dress. Dr. Felt immediately replied "What could be more fitting to my profession?" pointing to the two-winged insects he was studying.

He was faithful to the minute to his commitments. Many were the occasions when he accepted an invitation to talk at some humble, out-of-the-way garden club or other meeting. If he said he would be there, he was always present. This custom alone stamped him as a man of his word in the eyes of many of his great circle of friends.

His appearance as well as his character was left unchanged by the surging tide of years and he was until the last the same steadfast, striking figure. His carefully trimmed, white hair and Van Dyke beard, his calm, upright bearing, his impeccable dress, his gentle but firm voice, all reflected the imprint of his great character.

How frequently and forcefully the realization has come to me during the past two months that we will never again experience together the exhilaration of solving an important problem, or of unravelling one of nature's intricacies again; that no more will we talk over together the problems of the present or the plans of the future; that no more will I have his steadfast character upon which to lean or his guiding hand to point the way!

While his passing has been such a personal loss to me, how much greater has been the loss to the profession of entomology and to the entire world of science. His contributions will loom in importance during the passing years even as the memory of his personality may dim and fade.

The accompanying bibliography, transcribed from the card index by his secretary, Miss Beatrice Burns, gives his publications in chronological order. It is an inescapable conclusion that such a bibliography cannot be complete. Dr. Felt was accredited with having written more than seven hundred important and timely papers and articles which include a wide variety of entomological works.

The following may be considered his outstanding writings:

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